JOLIET JUNIOR COLLEGE

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

LUCIEN B. AND HELEN M. JOHNSON

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INTERVIEWEE AGREEMENT

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Nov. 7th 1976	Nov. 7th - 1976
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INTERVIEWEES: Mr. and Mrs. Lucien B. Johnson

INTERVIEWER: John Ballun

INTERVIEWER: This is an interview with John Ballun with Mr. and Mrs. Lucien B. Johnson for the Joliet Junior College Oral History Program in their home located near Elwood, Illinois, which is in Jackson Township of Will County, on August 10, 1976, at 7:30 p.m.

BALLUN: Okay, we'll begin, Mr. Johnson, by my first asking you if you could tell me when you were born, where you were born, and a little bit about your home town.

MR. JOHNSON: Well, John, I was born August 11 in 1912 in Salem, Illinois, Marion County. That's about 240 miles south of the city of Joliet down in the country that is called Little Eqypt. I got my schooling there and grew up to become a young man. I left there in about 1928 and I've made it my home since; however, I've gone back and forth, but I came to the northern part of the state and was in service and so on. Salem is a real nice little town. It's in the oil fields; there's a Lake Centrailia oil field which started in 1936. Salem is the birthplace of William Jennings Bryan; and when we get into the history part of it, William Jennings Bryan, as you might know, was three times a candidate for the president of the United States and was Secretary of State. He was also famous for the Skopes trial in Tennessee where he opposed Clarence Darrow, and that's where he died -- down in Dayton, Tennessee in 1925.

BALLUN: How would you compare Southern Illinois -- the people and the

places -- to the Will County area?

MR. JOHNSON: No comparison.

BALLUN: Why is that?

MR. JOHNSON: A complete different type of people altogether. The people in the north are more for themselves. They many times don't care about their next door neighbor. They go to work, they come home, they live their own life, they go to church, maybe they take active part in the church, maybe they don't -- where down in Salem people are very close, they are a very close-knit group of people. They believe in helping each other. We're getting away from that because we are getting an influx of the different types of people. You've got to remember what I am talking about is forty-some odd years ago. When I was down there, it was a small town of about 3,400 -- three thousand four hundred people. The oil boom hit in 1936, and we had people from all walks of life come in there. And some of them stayed -- their children were born and raised there, so you have a different breed. Now the town has about nine to ten thousand people; they are still trying to adapt to the philosophy of the small town, which I like. Here we are, close to a city. We are close to the city of Chicago, so it's altogether a different climate, a different group of people. Up here you have ethnic groups, which we don't have in the southern part of the state in Salem. We don't have a group of Italians and a group of Slovenians, and a group of Croatians, a group of colored and a group of another. We don't have that. Most of the people down there come from the melting pot -- our ancestors came from Germany and all over, but most of them are Americans, just plain Americans. Maybe once in a while when I was a boy, we had a couple of Greek families in there. They ran the -- a

candy kitchen and a restaurant. We had some Jewish people in there that ran the clothing store. We had a German fellow that ran the bakery and things like that, but that was it. We all were integrated into one, and I think this it what it was. We had many churches in Salem and they were all well-attended, but it's a different type life altogether.

BALLUN: When you came to Elwood, was Elwood a clannish town like that?

MR. JOHNSON: Very clannish in Elwood, in Jackson Township.

BALLUN: Is it still that way?

MR. JOHNSON: Well, it's changing. When I first came to Elwood, Jackson Township, one of the first things they told me was to "be careful about talking about someone, because everybody's related," and that's the way it was when I came to Elwood in 1947. Everybody was a relative of somebody else, so you don't talk about people. And they were very clannish. However, that has changed, too, over the years. We've had people come out here from Joliet, we've had people who come out here from Chicago, which has changed the complexion of Jackson Township and the little town of Elwood. For example, we have a man that is the Mayor of the little town of Elwood from Arkansas -- where for years I've been told that it was local people, the Coldwaters that ran the town. Grandpa Coldwater was the Mayor, then his son was Mayor, and so on and so forth. Now we have a man from Arkansas and he's doing a fine job. So the complexion is changing. I think our whole world is changing in this respect, because everybody is everybody else's neighbor; transportation, good roads and all -- this is definitely a factor.

BALLUN: Okay. We'll try to get some further insight in Elwood by talking

to Mrs. Johnson. You were born here. Could you tell me when you were born and where you lived in your early years?

MRS JOHNSON: Yes. I was born in October 24, 1908, right across the road. And I moved once, over here. When I was four years old, my dad built this place. Of course, Elwood's been home to me, but it's changed. My friends are gone, and people move away and it's different.

BALLUN: What did your father do?

MRS. JOHNSON: He was a farmer. . . .

MR. JOHNSON; I think you could ask her about her education.

BALLUN: Okay. Could you tell me the schools you went to in this area then?

MRS. JOHNSON: I went to the Brown School over here, and we had the most wonderful teachers. The Bruce girls taught there, Ella Bruce taught there and then Almeda Brown taught there and she certainly went the second mile. She was wonderful. She was just like our parents, almost. She was so good to us, she took us on camping trips, and to Chicago, and down to Starved Rock and down to Luther's Island down near Wilmington camping. She was just so good to us, but you had to mind. There was no monkey business; you minded. And that's all right. I have nothing against that; that's the way it should be. And then I went to Joliet to high school, graduated from J. T. in '26. Of course, we didn't have buses -- well, later on they did, but I rode with Jim O'Connor across the road. He had a brass front Ford, and he drove and took the group of us from around here. /Chuckle/

MR. JOHNSON: And you went to junior college.

MRS. JOHNSON Yes, then I went a year to junior college. Then I went into nurse's training in Chicago -- graduated from Presbyterian Hospital in Chicago. Then I worked at Wisconsin Orthopedic Hospital in Madison, Wisconsin. Then I did private duty in Chicago; then I worked down at Joliet Arsenal; then the war came on and I worked in the First Aid Department, both in construction and in production.

BALLUN: Can you describe the Arsenal back then? How is it different now than it was then?

MRS. JOHNSON: Oh, that was quite an upsetting experience. When they came in to buy this land, you didn't know how far they were going to go and just whose land was going to be taken. When I first worked down there, it was way down in the Arsenal area in an old farmhouse, and we were right close there during construction. Then after they built the hospital over on the Elwood Ordinance side, then I worked in the hospital area and was there when the plant blew up.

BALLUN: Can you tell me a little about that? You mentioned that the other night.

MRS. JOHNSON: Well, just like a terrific clap of thunder, it woke one up out of a sound sleep. When I went out to get the car -- they had called me to go down to work -- the door was blown off the rollers on the track. We worked for 36 to 40 hours straight. Oh, I forget how many hours straight down there. I think there were 52 men killed in that explosion.

BALLUN: Did they discover the cause of the explosion?

MRS. JOHNSON: Yes, I think. As I have always understood it, they were packing mines, land mines, into box cars. And, of course, you had to handle those with care; and some of those people weren't as careful as they might have been, and their supervisor said, "Take the sledge hammer and drive them in there so you can pack in more." And they did, and that's what we always understood was the reason why it went off; they pounded too hard. And it blew up. That was really something!!

BALLUN: Can you tell me a little bit about this house, the history of it? Mr. Johnson, if you have anything to add, feel free.

MRS. JOHNSON : What was it Dad paid for this house -- $3200? $3200.

MR. JOHNSON: This house was built and they moved in in September 1912. And we have records that says that it cost $3200 to build this house.

MRS. JOHNSON: It was the first house in the area that had a toilet and a bath tub.

MR. JOHNSON: Water in the house, and electricity.

MRS. JOHNSON: We made our own electricity. They had a storage plant in the basement. My dad wasn't mechanically inclined, so he had to have a young man that was handy with engines and things like that, from Manhattan, come over and help till my brother got used to running the engine. The lights weren't as bright, of course, as they are now; but they were much better than the old lamp. My girlfriends always enjoyed coming over and being able to take a bath in the tub and things like that. Then when we remodeled -- when Red and I bought the place, and remodeled the downstairs, and put a half-bath down here and remodeled the kitchen

and put the new windows in here -- what was it that that cost?

MR. JOHNSON: Sixty-seven hundred dollars.

BALLUN: Just to remodel it!

MRS. JOHNSON: Just to remodel it. Isn't that terrible?

BALLUN: The barn out there. Is the original barn very old? Can you tell me something about that?

MRS. JOHNSON: Yes. That was built in 1856, as I've always understood; and it was made of hand-hewn timbers put together with wooden pegs. There was a lot of work associated with that!! Dad used to feed cattle out there. There's a trough around the edge where they put the feed into the cattle.

BALLUN: Okay. The house across the street-- you said that it was called the Gay place. Can you tell me a little brief history about that?

MRS. JOHNSON: Well, Freeman Gay was a wealthy farmer, as I understand it, and he built that house. It had 42 rooms, and it was really the show-place in this area. Then my grandfather and my dad bought it from Mr. Gay. Then they moved it, and what was a part of the house, they moved off and used it for a barn. It was a big barn, too!

MR. JOHNSON: That barn burned in 1956.

MRS. JOHNSON: And there was the Gay's lane that came from the east up the road, and it was lined with evergreens, beautiful, big, old evergreens. Down at the corner on my dad's side of the land, the northwest corner, was the Jackson Grange Hall, and on the opposite corner, east, was the Brown Church.

BALLUN: Well, what happened to these buildings?

MRS. JOHNSON: Well, when the four-lane highway went through, that was the end of them.

BALLUN: What sort of activities went on in the Grange Hall?

MRS. JOHNSON: Oh, it, of course, was the farmers' organization and they had . . .

MR. JOHNSON: Neighborhood socials.

MRS. JOHNSON: Yes. They had plays . . . business meetings.

MR. JOHNSON: Activities, dances, and . . .

MRS. JOHNSON: Box socials and dances. It was really nice.

BALLUN: Where did Plank Road go to?

MRS. JOHNSON: I don't know where the Plank Road went to for sure, but. . . I think it went to Joliet. The Wilhelmi School there by Lee's now was called the Plank Road School. I'm not sure, but then it went on into Joliet and on to Plainfield.

MR. JOHNSON: Plank Road wasn't in Jackson Township?

MRS. JOHNSON: Yes, it was partly. Then there was Moldt's Grove in Jackson Township down west here where they had picnics and,I guess, fairs, like country fairs down there in the summertime and it was real nice.

BALLUN: Can you tell me about how you got your mail and how you got your milk -- how was it delivered back then?

MRS. JOHNSON Oh, I remember. Let's see -- there was a Mr. Stonerock; he was one of our mail carriers. And then there was a Fab Morse; he was a mail carrier, too, and he had a funny little box-like wagon on his buggy that he used in winter to deliver mail. He had something he used to keep warm in there, some little -- some kind of a heater or a soapstone. I don't know whether it was charcoal or what it was in there that kept him warm. And then we had to go down to the corner to get our mail every day. We always knew, of course, when he was due and he was very regular. Of course, he was driving a horse -- no automobiles in those days. And then our milk -- we had our own cow part of the time or else we could get some milk across the road from the O'Connors. Dad raised pigs; he always called them "mortgage raisers". /Laughter/

BALLUN: Did he enter them into fairs or anything?

MRS. JOHNSON: I don't know -- not after I was around.

BALLUN: Can you tell me something about the old Methodist Church, the history of the church in Elwood?

MRS. JOHNSON: Well, as I first remember, we all went down to the Brown Church. And it had an old pot-bellied stove; you burned wood in it. The organ you pumped with your feet. And we had old wooden pews -- when they dismantled the church, we had one of the pews. Now it is over by the Corner Store, Antique Store in Elwood. It sits there and it's real handy for people to sit on and rest and visit.

MR. JOHNSON: Well, didn't the minister from the Brown Church come out from the Elwood Methodist Church?

MRS. JOHNSON: Yes, the minister who had the church in Elwood, the Methodist Church in Elwood, came out here. I think Mr. Putnam, Ray Putnam, was the last one. But then when automobiles came along, we could all go into Elwood -- so we did. Of course, there was the Presbyterian Church in there also.

MR. JOHNSON: John, I might instruct you just a little bit while we're on this subject. My wife's grandfather came from the old sturdy stock. He was born in Orleans County, New York, and came to this part of the country in a covered wagon.

MRS. JOHNSON: Yes, my grandfather did; but Dad didn't. Dad was born over near Lisbon, Illinois.

MR. JOHNSON: Yes, he lived over in Lisbon; but his parents, my wife's grandparents, once owned a home where the old Herald-News Building was on the corner of Van Buren and Scott Streets in Joliet. That was their home for a time. My wife's father -- way back in 1885 -- we'll say in that neighborhood -- decided to leave this part of the country and went to Hoopeston, Illinois, in Vermillion County. He drove cattle overland from the Joliet area to Hoopeston. He was down there several years. There his children were born, and for some reason or another he came back up here. Those are things that are part of history. Those are things that are part of my wife's heritage, because we know of these things. Now we have traced my wife's heritage in Orleans County, New York, and talked to people out there -- distant relatives -- and visited the cemeteries out there.

MRS. JOHNSON: Tell him about the Senator -- Almanzor Hutchinson.

MR. JOHNSON: Oh, yes, when we were on our trip out there, kind of making a search of these things, we found that one of my wife's great uncles was a state senator in the state of New York. He was born in 1818, so he was an old-timer. He sat in Seat 15 in the New York State Senate; we found that out. These were the things that my wife has in her favor here. Now her father, of course, when they came here and settled, like she said, my father-in-law was born in Lisbon, Illinois, which is perhaps 35 miles west of here. But they're the old breed, they're the old stock, they're the type of people that in my estimation built this country. They cut it out of the wilderness. They were here when the Indians were here. My father-in-law knew Chief Shabbona, and told stories about when the old chief was alive, and things like this. These are the type of things that I think you really want to get at.

BALLUN: Can you tell me something about some of the other old, original houses here? In the neighborhood here? In Jackson Township?

MRS. JOHNSON: The Noels -- and the Boylans lived down there in that stone house. That is one of the oldest houses in the area. Mr. Boylan was a surveyor.

MR. JOHNSON: One of the original surveyors of this township, of this county -- Boylan.

MRS. JOHNSON: Then there was Irv Noels up here north a little ways, and then William Brown -- he was an old settler, too. And Frank Brown, too, on the other side of the Brown Cemetery.

BALLUN: Did they start the Brown School also?

MRS. JOHNSON: Yes, I think that it probably came out of their land.

MR. JOHNSON: The Brown School was the only Brown School. The Brown Church was down here, but the Brown School was up the road south. And that was taken off the Frank Brown farm.

BALLUN: Do you know where the Noels came from -- the original family?

MR. JOHNSON: No, I don't.

MRS. JOHNSON: From the east somewhere.

BALLUN: Can you think of any other families in the Elwood area?

MRS. JOHNSON: Well, the Tehles -- yes, Raymond Tehle's father. His name was Clarence Tehle.

BALLUN: Where is their house?

MRS. JOHNSON: It's just over southwest. Then there were the Eibs, Peter Eibs, and the Attaways, and the Palmers.

MR. JOHNSON: The Coldwaters.

MRS. JOHNSON: Yes, the Coldwaters.

MR. JOHNSON: They were the old settlers here.

BALLUN: What about the O'Connors?

MRS. JOHNSON: They bought Dad's place when Dad sold it in 1912.

MR. JOHNSON: In 1912.

MRS. JOHNSON: They had lived over by the Brown School in the old Cagwin place, and they were a wonderful family! There was never any finer fam-

ily than they, and Mr. and Mrs. O'Connor raised a wonderful family of six children. They are still the salt of the earth.

BALLUN: Mr. Johnson, could you tell me about the family that used to live in the Milo house and who built it?

MR. JOHNSON: Yes, John, I'd be glad to. That's a very, very interesting thing. I think it is definitely a part of the history of the Jackson Township. Right west of us there is a well-built stone house. And I have always been told that it was built for men because there was a man and his wife and four sons. So the man dominated things down there. The house was built for men, and Mr. Sidell owned 30-some acres of land down there which was pretty much in timber. In later years he started raising asparagus. Mr. Sidell was quite a man; he came here from Ohio. His name was Roscoe Sidell.

MRS. JOHNSON: Roscoe Sidell.

MR. JOHNSON: Roscoe Sidell and wife Mary Sidell were the parents of four boys, namely: Chester, Richard, Philip, and Franklin. And all four of the boys went to school right over here at the Brown School, a little country school. They finished their high school education in Joliet where their father was a Physics teacher in the high school and also a chemist, very much interested in chemistry and physics. Then the boys all excelled themselves, three of them in the field of medicine and one in the field of engineering, namely, air conditioning. Chester is in California now, an internationally-known dermitologist and practices part-time on the Good Ship Hope, and bought the Al Jolson Estate in California, we understand. Richard is an internationally-known surgeon,

who is in Grand Rapids, Michigan; and Philip, the engineer, passed away a year or so ago, and he had received one of the highest honors that any civilian can ever receive in time of war -- the Congressional Medal of Honor, or the equivalent, for ventilating our tanks in Africa during the North African campaign. Franklin is a general practicioner in the St. Paul-Minneapolis area. The three boys that followed the medical field are all Fellows of Mayos, Mayo University, Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. Fine, fine people! Their mother majored in music and was quite a musician. She was born in Bloomington, Illinois; their father was born in Ohio, and they met in college. It's very seldom that you see a family with four children that have excelled themselves like they did. Their house burned down one year at Christmas time. It was very cold, and four of them moved in here with my wife's folks until they could get straightened around. Back in those day, that's what they did. The neighbors helped each other.

BALLUN: While we're talking to you two, I'd like to move a little bit now to Jackson Township in particular. You've been supervisor for eight years and I wonder if you'd tell me a little bit about the Township's history. To start perhaps you'd tell me about the building of Route 66 and how it changed different things in the Township.

MR. JOHNSON: Of course, I wasn't here when Route 66 was built. As you know, John, when this country was laid out, they tried to lay the townships out in six square-mile areas. It was a township, and that township was governed over by a board like any other board and headed by a supervisor. And he had a board that worked with him. At that time, when a man was elected supervisor of a township, it automatically entitled him to a seat

on the County Board which was the county government. Townships were part of the county government, policy-making group of the county, and, of course, while he sat on that County Board, he had his own constituency -- he had his own six square-mile area of his people that he looked after, that he made sure that their tax money was spent in the right way and as much of it as possible would come back from the county, into the township, in the form of roads and bridges and so on and so forth. We've got many miles of roads in this township. At one time we had 14 bridges in the township. The townships weren't big enough to build those bridges; they had to have help from the county so this is why the supervisor would have a seat on that board. And it was our forefathers, and I am a strong, firm believer in township government, school board, local school boards. Now we have seen in our time, my wife and I, the country school disappear. They've gone into town. Well, this was progress, they said; but our forefathers, when they laid this country out, they said the neighborhood was the closest thing to the people. People knew in a neighborhood, knew what was best for that neighborhood, not big government. So this is why they had their local schools. My wife was president of the Brown School Board at one time, and they had local people. Mr. O'Connor was on the school board. And they would do things for that school that was best for the people of this school district. Then they did away with them, so all of our children went to Elwood to school. We've never had a high school, only a two-year high school in Elwood. That was done away with so most of our children go to Joliet, and they graduate from Joliet. Now they're fighting the same thing, trying to do away with townships. Township government now is on its way out. And the reason for it, I think, John, and I say this very sorrowfully, I don't think it's good.

I'm not for it; I think that we should have township governments. But I think we should elect people to township government that are interested in the township. It's awfully hard nowadays to get somebody to run for township office. It's time-consuming and your phone rings day and night, and they heap all their problems and all their troubles on you, which is all right; but I think people have got to be dedicated to this kind of thing to be the supervisor of the township. You've got to like to work with people. I think the Village of Elwood with its village government is good because, who knows better what they want in Elwood than the people that live in Elwood. No need to go to Springfield or Joliet or to Washington, D.C. to see what's best for Elwood; those people know what's best, and this is what I think it's all about. This is why, one of the main reasons why, I'm in politics, because politics is people, and people are my life because I like people, and I like to work with people. But we -- thank God that we've got a two-party system in our country. I hope that never changes. I like the idea of difference of opinion because it brings out in a broad spectrum things that maybe we would overlook if we had one party -- and it was a dictatorship. We're free; we can go from one to the other. This is what it's all about. And we are moving very, very fast toward -- you know it, as a young man -- you studied it in school, metro government, big government. They want a metro-police system and everything. Look to "Father" in Washington, D.C. for everything, and it's wrong. Our forefathers said there would be three distinct branches of government, executive, judicial, and legislative. Let's keep it like that. Let's let it stay like that. And your township -- in the township -- your supervisor was the executive branch of the government in Jackson Township. My board, my board of auditors, and my highway commissioner and my town clerk and those people were the legislative branch. They were

the ones that brought things to the executive branch to pass legislation that affected the people in this township. And this is the way it should be. And if it ever goes, we're all done, I think. But I'm not sure, with your communication and your transportation -- and they call it, John, you know, you can't stop progress. But sometimes progress might jump up and destroy you. It has a tendency.

BALLUN: You have a very significant argument there. Can we backtrack a little bit and talk about a few specific things in the township like the city hall in Elwood? Do you know anything about that -- its past?

MR. JOHNSON: Not so much about the city hall. The city hall at Elwood is rather new.

MRS. JOHNSON: The town hall, you know. . .

MR. JOHNSON: The city hall -- he's talking about the village hall. The township hall is old. We have two here. We have a city hall, just like in Joliet. We have a municipal building and a county building, and in Elwood we have a village hall, and we have a village form of government and we have a township form of government. The seat of the township government is also in Elwood. Now the town hall in Elwood is old. I don't know how old. We tried to find out during my administration. As supervisor of the township, when I took over, the town hall which belongs to the people, had a coal stove, and that was the heating plant. It had lights that hung down on a cord from the ceiling. That was the light plant. No running water, no sanitary facilities of any kind, just a building with a stove and the lights hanging down. We immediately appropriated money to bring the town hall up to date. We have one of the most beautiful floors

in that town hall that you'll ever want to look at -- but nobody knew what it looked like because it was so covered with dirt and dust and coal grime from the coal stove. They scrubbed it and scrubbed it and scrubbed it, and it came out beautiful. It is a beautiful floor. And then we put in a Ladies' Room,and a Men's Room, and water, and we put in a heating system in the walls, and we put up drapes and fixed it up; and when we had a grand opening, we invited everybody there. We tried to get some of the older people to give us some idea of when it was built, and no one seemed to know. It was back in the 1800's, when it was built on a very choice piece of land over there. But it belongs -- we're one of the few townships -- in the county -- that has a township hall. Some of the townships don't have a township hall. They meet in church basements or something like that. But we have a township hall, and I'm glad. We put up a flag pole and I wanted (but I didn't get it done), I wanted to put up a memorial over there on each side of the walk. We didn't get that done. I hope some day maybe yet that we might be able to get that done, because it's something, it's the people's, it belongs to the people. Right across the street is the village park, a nice little park across the street. So it's fine. What'll become of it in years to come, I don't know.

BALLUN: Can you tell me something about the highways here -- through the township?

MR. JOHNSON: All through the township?

BALLUN: I'm talking specifically about this one that's . . .

MR. JOHNSON: Well, as I said before, I wasn't here when these roads were

built, but this . . . When my wife went to school in Joliet, what is known as Chicago Road was gravel. Then, after that, it was paved and became the original Route 66 from Chicago to California. And it went down and around through Elwood and some sharp curves that the old-timers can still remember and part of the old road is still there. Well, then when the plants came in here, in the early forties, the government then needed high-speed highways to get their employees back and forth, so they built this road -- dual lanes from Joliet to beyond their plant entrances -- to the south, just north of Wilmington. And they called that Alternate 66. No, they called it 66, didn't they? Yes. They called that 66. So now that's two Routes 66. Then later on they moved 66 to the west, so then they called the one to the west 66 and this one Alternate 66. And they came together at Gardner down south of here. Well, now, of course, it's gone farther west yet, and it's called I-55. So actually what started here as a gravel road now winds up as a four-lane interstate highway which is now called I-55.

MRS. JOHNSON: (Route) 66, though, and I-55 are the same.

MR. JOHNSON: One and the same, as they go south; and then as you get down to Bloomington, it branches off and 66 goes through Bloomington and 55 goes around and they meet at the south end. But eventually they'll do away with the 66 and it will be 55. But it originally came right down through here and touched the edge of Elwood -- the little town of Elwood.

BALLUN: Can you think of anything else about the township worth stressing?

MR. JOHNSON: The township, what?

BALLUN: The township in general. Any history that you think . . .?

MR. JOHNSON: Well, we have 42 miles of roads, as I said, that we have to maintain -- and 13 bridges at one time. Some of those bridges have since collapsed. When I was supervisor, we rebuilt three of those bridges. In some instances we had to go to the bank and borrow money because we didn't have the money to do with. In some townships, when a bridge falls in, they just close the road; we didn't. We kept our roads open. We're very proud of it, and we rebuilt many roads in the township. And I could sit here and talk for a long time on the eight years when I was supervisor. I'm very proud of it. And I'm sure that the boys running it now will think of their own administrations in the same way. And they have made some improvements and I'm for them all the way, because this is what the people want -- government within themselves.

BALLUN: Now, Mrs. Johnson, back when you were young, can you think of anything else that's worth pressing, like do you remember when the first fire department was in the area -- in Elwood, or wherever it is?

MRS. JOHNSON: Oh, I remember when the iceman used to come around. He was from Wilmington -- Gadberry -- no -- Gadberry had the bus that went from Joliet to Wilmington. What was that fellow's name? Mr. Sweetwood in Elwood had the ice. He used to come around with ice. And we had our old icebox. But then before that, in the wintertime, each farmer had an ice house; and then the farmers would get together and go down to the creek and cut ice and bring it up and store it in the ice houses and so then they had something to keep their milk and things cold during the summer. That was a lot of work.

MR. JOHNSON: Did you ever hear of that, John?

BALLUN: No. /Chuckle/

MR. JOHNSON: Well, they did. They had a little house.

MRS. JOHNSON: It wasn't so little, either.

MR. JOHNSON: And it had sawdust in the walls, for insulation and all that. And a very heavy door that shut and when the creek would freeze solid and they thought it was right, they'd go down there and saw the ice and bring it up and put it in the ice house. And this is what they used.

MRS. JOHNSON: And they had windmills, of course, to pump the water.

MR. JOHNSON: But I don't remember, and I don't know whether you do -- the fire department. They had one, I'm sure. Elwood burned one time. Do you remember that? That was before your time.

MRS. JOHNSON: No. I remember when the Methodist Church burned.

MR. JOHNSON: But Elwood burned, too, and they had to rebuild it. But I would presume it was like all other small towns, and they had a volunteer fire department, maybe had horses, maybe they didn't in a small town like this. The men took the hoses on carriers and got to the fire the best they could with it; but, I don't know. . . While we're on that subject, we have a very fine fire department now in the township. Of course, now it's a fire district and the Elwood Fire District is real good. The boys are volunteers; it's all volunteers; they're dedicated people, and I think it's great when people will volunteer to do those things. And these boys are doing so. When that barn burned right over

there, this house could have burned; our barn could have burned, but people like Freddie Blatt, who is not our postmaster, and other people that I could name, came out here and worked on Sunday afternoon and saved the buildings on this side of the road -- so they must be given a lot of credit.

MR. JOHNSON: Now we had some good doctors, too -- Dr. Hood, and Dr. Gilbert -- they were dedicated people, too, my goodness!

BALLUN: Were they born here or did they come here?

MR. JOHNSON: No. I think they came in. Dr. Gilbert had a little office just west of Schumacher's old house on the Main Street of Elwood there right across from the Methodist Church.

BALLUN: I wondered about something. Now all the farmers have huge estates and they plow up hundreds of acres. How much land was used before -- I mean they didn't have tractors -- how much land did they use?

MRS. JOHNSON: Sixty or eighty acres, probably; and the horses did the work. I can remember when my dad retired over here. Of course, he had to have his garden, and he raised all the potatoes we needed and all the sweet corn and all the garden produce and everything. He had a one-horse cultivator, and it was my job to ride the horse while Dad guided and held the plow. And my goodness, that was always a trial because you might get bumped off the horse when you would go under a tree or something. /Chuckle/ You'd get scratched and everything.

MR. JOHNSON: You don't realize that eighty acres back years ago was a big farm.

BALLUN: It had to be.

MR. JOHNSON: And because a man -- back in those days a farmer's life was a rough life. He was up before daylight, milked his cows, fed his horses, before he had any breakfast. Then he came in and had his breakfast, then he'd go out and harness up his horse or team, and he'd go to the field, and he would plow one row at a time. And then he would have to go over it with a harrow. Of course, as the years went by they had improvements in equipment. But today, with modern machinery, they farm a thousand acres and don't think anything about it. But if a man had eighty acres -- Mr. O'Connor across the road bought eighty acres of ground from my wife's father, and he raised four boys and two girls.

MRS. JOHNSON: He rented and worked this land, too -- an additional sixty acres.

MR. JOHNSON: Yes, he worked this land, too. But those were the days when people really worked. Now a farmer has a different life altogether.

BALLUN: Were the crops the same back then as they are now?

MR. JOHNSON: Yes, but they didn't raise soybeans back in those days. Soybeans are a more recent crop.

BALLUN: Was there a crop rotation, though?

MRS. JOHNSON: Oh, yes. Corn and oats and hay and wheat and some barley. And they used to, I remember, cut the grassy area between the road and the farmer's fence; they would cut that for hay, and I remember riding along with them on the hayrack and they'd pile it onto the hayrack and

bring it in for feed for the cows and horses. They didn't let it go to waste.

BALLUN: You said you raised a lot of food on the farm. How much grocery shopping did you do, and where did you do it?

MRS. JOHNSON: Oh, we would go generally once a week to town, to Joliet, to get the staples that we needed.

MR. JOHNSON: Once a week? In the summertime, but not in the wintertime, because her mother made the bread and things like that.

MRS. JOHNSON: Yes, you made your own bread.

MR. JOHNSON: Back in those days most farmers went to town on Saturdays, and they'd take their eggs and their cream and sell it in town and buy the staples that they needed for the farm. And it was always quite a gathering place at the hitchrack where they, the farmers, came in and tied their teams and exchanged ideas and sold their cream and their eggs and bought some staples that they needed at home -- coffee, and things like that.

MRS. JOHNSON: There was a place in Joliet that the farmers used to love to go to. It was down on Joliet Street, just south of Jefferson Street. It wasn't any fancy place at all; it was just mostly for the men, and they had awfully good pie in there. And I can remember Dad would come home and Mother would say, "Where were you?" or "What did you do?" and, well, he would say he ate at "Full and Dirty". It was "full" and "dirty". And that was what they called it! But they had the best pie! /Laughter/

MR. JOHNSON: John, it's awfully nice to capture what you're doing, to capture . . . Heaven forbid, we're not the elder citizens yet! But we're

getting there. /Chuckle/ But to capture, and to put those things down is really a part of the American history. And I like it; I think it's great. And we call it -- sometimes -- and I've heard it argued -- debated pro and con -- you hear the old saying, "back in the good old days."

BALLUN : Right.

MR. JOHNSON: Well, "the good old days" are today, yesterday, and things like that. They're different -- altogether different. Now I enjoy going to the Amish Dutch country where yesterdays are still todays. They're still farming with the horses and their walking plows and things like that. I don't say that it was the best part of our country, but definitely it was a colorful part of our country. They lived a different life, a full life; they took things as it came, and they were thankful to the good Lord for what they had then. Today we're living too fast, where everybody's all tied up. Everybody's trying to fight everybody else, and we're going too fast. We had better start slowing down. And this is why I say to you -- when I get home, I want to get in this big chair. You can call it old age, you can call it whatever you want to, but I'm tired because I have been on a dead run all day.

MRS. JOHNSON: In the wintertime the farmers would cut firewood. And Dad used to have a big wood pile that was out in the side yard so it was handy to get at, and he brought the wood in baskets for the cookstove. That's what you would burn. And then when you shelled corn, you put the cobs in the cob house. And you used the cobs to start the fires with -- that's your kitchen stove fire or your furnace fire. There was always something more to be done. /Chuckle/

MR. JOHNSON: I was born and raised in town. And when I came here and started going with my wife, I picked up an expression that I'd never heard before. Out underneath the sink in the kitchen where they put the garbage and things like that, you know, they called it the "swill pail".

MRS. JOHNSON: They fed it to the pigs.

MR. JOHNSON: They fed it to the pigs.

MRS. JOHNSON: Mixed it in with the corn and oats.

MR. JOHNSON: I never knew what a swill pail was, but I learned that and adopted it up here because my wife is a farm girl. She was raised on this farm. So, if you had any scraps from the table or anything, you put it in the swill pail.

MRS.JOHNSON : Leftovers -- old stuff. You didn't throw very much away. Dad had a trough out there where he put the corn and the scraps, the swill in there -- and mixed it up for the pigs.

BALLUN: Did the farmers help each other a lot, like when a big crop had to be harvested?

MRS. JOHNSON: Oh, yes, they were so good that way. Why, you couldn't get anywhere if you didn't have your neighbors to help.

MR. JOHNSON: They still do it to a certain extent.

MRS. JOHNSON: If anybody got sick, they'd help each other, too.

MR. JOHNSON: Back in the old days, when it was threshing time -- and threshing time was a busy time, but it was a good time, for the younger

people especially, because food was plentiful wherever they were working. There was plenty, of course. . . Did you ever go in one of these threshing gangs? . . . Why, it's a great thing! It's an education to see these old-time threshing machines in operation. But still, they do -- when it's shelling time. Of course, a lot of times now they don't put ear corn in the cribs -- they shell it in the field. But if they do put their ear corn in the crib, the farmers around help each other. When it's shelling time, they drive trucks, etc. I think that still goes on. Out in our area I know it does; they help each other.

MR. JOHNSON: And the tiling, too, now that was another big job because the wet spots had to be tiled. And, oh, my goodness, I can remember Dad telling about this -- Pete Slater, I believe was his name -- he did the tiling all around the area. Oh, poor Pete, we kept him busy. All he had was his spade to dig the trench for the tile. He was a hard-working man! They all were. There wasn't any lazy ones, I don't think, back in those days. If you wanted to eat, you worked. /Chuckle/

BALLUN: Well, we're running out of time now and I want to thank you very much for your cooperation.

MRS. JOHNSON: Well, you're welcome.

MR. JOHNSON: It's a pleasure.

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